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Manufactured Madness: Bertha Mason in the Crosshairs of Disability Discourse

Jissmon K. J.

This article critically examines the representation and characterisation of the famous 'madwoman in the attic,' Bertha Mason, under the nuances of disability studies and Foucauldian theory. The character of Bertha is depicted as an epitome of madness who is hysterical, insane, animalistic in her endeavours and beyond any form of control. The critical paradigm of disability studies and Foucauldian theories unravel the fact that Bertha's condition is not a congenital one but rather a socio-cultural construct, which is mediated through various discourses of disability propagated by dominant systems of power and knowledge. The article tries to shed light on the fact that her disability status as a 'madwoman' is a mere social phenomenon. It contextualises the general norm on which the notion of corporeality is demarcated as abled or disabled and tries to reimagine the plethora of ways the character of Bertha Mason is deemed as 'mad' from disability studies and Foucauldian perspectives.

Keywords: disability, discourse, gender, madness, social construct

Introduction

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of certain theoretical schools and disciplines that were concerned with the various facades of corporeality. The human body, which was till then perceived as the union of the physical and the metaphysical, came to be viewed as a site where infinite play of signification, whether it is social, political, or cultural, takes place. The

mainstream critical corpus was overtly reserved for the analysis and understanding of 'normal' human figures that conform to the norm of society, excluding the 'abnormal' or the 'other' from corporeal aesthetics.

Disability Studies as an academic discipline emerged by the end of the 1980s as a reaction against this exclusion of the supposedly 'abnormal,' 'other,' 'disabled' bodies from academic and critical circles. Eminent scholars like Rosemarie Garland Thomson, Lennard J. Davis, Simi Linton, and so on advocated for a paradigm shift in understanding disability and people with disability. The theoretical school of disability studies delineates the difference between the natural and the socially constructed aspects of corporealisation. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, in her seminal text on disability studies entitled *Extraordinary Bodies*, takes on the social construction of disability in people with impairments. For her, "disability is a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration, and a comparison of bodies that structures social relations and institutions" (Thomson, 1997, p. 6). The anomaly from the normal is often considered a threat to society and ends up inheriting the uniqueness of 'otherness', which needs to be 'harnessed' or looked after. What the advocates of disability studies try to do is to differentiate between the natural formation of 'impairment' and the socio-cultural creation of 'disability.' While the former refers to the biological condition one attains at birth, the latter undoubtedly refers to the cultural perception through which the 'different' or the 'abnormal' is often viewed or understood over time. The social model of disability perceives disability as a social category operated from an ableist perspective conforming abled bodies as superior and disabled as inferior. As Elizabeth DePoy and Stephen French Gilson (2011) write:

> [The notion of] impairment is a corporeal condition which leaves a body aesthetically or functionally different and to a great extent inferior to the typical unimpaired body. Disability is distinguished from impairment as a social condition in which impaired bodies are met with discrimination and exclusion. In this nomenclature, terms such as physically or cognitively disabled do not make sense and should be supplanted by physical or cognitive impairment.

> From this distinction, the social model of disability emerged. Through this modular lens, the body is not indicted as the locus of disability at all. Disability is simply a discriminatory social response to an atypical body. (p. 35)

It is this socio-cultural nexus that propels the formation and configuration of disability as otherness or unnatural, which distinguishes it from that of 'normates,' the corporeal condition which "designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definite human beings" (Thomson, 1997, p. 8). This social construction of disability as a weak category could be related to the notions of power and knowledge propounded by the twentieth-century historian and critic Michel Foucault. A meticulous observation points towards the fact that the abled/disabled or the normate/non-normate binary is moulded through the notions of power and knowledge and, most intriguingly, articulated through various 'discourses' that run through the fabric of society. This concerned article tries to scrutinise and analyse the famous "madwoman in the attic," Bertha Mason, from the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, and her notion of madness as a disability category, which is socially constructed, under the theoretical framework put forward by Michel Foucault (Gilbert & Gubar, 2020, p. xi). A Foucauldian reading of Bertha's madness as a discursive production unravels and neutralises the ways her subject is represented as deviant in a supposedly 'sane' world. Bertha attains her disability status through the production of specific bodies of knowledge and discursive practices, which affirm her madness as a reality rather than a mere social construct.

A Foucauldian Perspective Towards Disability

A Foucauldian perspective sheds much light on the very foundations of disability as a discursive category. The notions of Power, Knowledge, and Discourse, coined by the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault in the latter half of the 20th century, depict the ways people interact within a set of norms and how society is politically aligned and arranged. Much of Foucault's theoretical arguments are focused on power relations, how society is controlled by certain bodies of knowledge, and how the human subject is created.

In his polemic, the notion of power is not suppressive but rather productive and ubiquitous, even in everyday interactions. The inextricable relationship between power and knowledge can be seen in his seminal texts, such as *The Order of Things*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and *Discipline and Punish*. In *Power/Knowledge*, which was published in 1980, Foucault maps out the power/knowledge binary to denote the ways both power and knowledge are intrinsically and mutually related. Those who exercise power and engage in power relations produce knowledge and set the limits to what is valid and what is invalid. This very aspect of knowledge, in turn, perpetuates the notion of power. This reciprocal relationship between power and knowledge is unique since, as Foucault (1980) states, "it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (p. 52). In this perplexing relationship, the primary concern would be those who exercise power since they end up creating various bodies of knowledge and vice versa.

The crux of Foucault's arguments culminates in his notion of 'discourse.' Discourses could be seen as the vehicles by which various knowledge or 'epistemes' are created and articulated (Foucault, 1972). They perpetuate and carry forward the notions of knowledge and power. Foucault (1972) introduces the concept of discourse in his epoch-making text *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, published in 1969, "as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation" (p. 107). Discourses dictate and determine what should or should not be done, performed or articulated in a society or in any context. It is both inclusive and exclusive at the same time. It is a form of language, whether it is verbal, non-verbal or symbolic, "shaped and determined by situational rules and context" (Buchanan, 2010, p. 134). These language formations, which eventually end up in certain 'discursive formations,' are not naturally given and hence could potentially be unstable and imbalanced. These discursive formations are always formed through various power plays and epistemic formations by creating specific epistemes or knowledge systems, which corroborate how the system is expected to perform. As Foucault (1972) denotes, it is nothing but an archive where one could identify it as "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable

group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (p. 80). It is these statements that validate and promote knowledge and power structures.

Disability as a Discourse

The nexus between power and knowledge can be utilised to peruse disability as a phenomenon and notion which is constructed through regimes of social control rather than a medical condition. The discursive production and articulation of knowledge and belief systems call into question the objectivity on which the concept and category of disability are created and fostered. From a Foucauldian perspective, the notion and nuances of disability could be understood as a discourse intertwined with a complex set of statements which is propagated through relations of power and knowledge rather than a condition of corporeal impairment since "[it] neither equals disability nor causes it" (Tremain, 2005, p. 9). The discourse of disability has the potential enough to effect marginalisation among able-bodied and disabled-bodied human subjects by excluding the latter from the 'norm.' This eventually perpetuates ableism and labels the disabled as 'other,' 'subhuman,' or 'weak,' having undesirable physical or mental embodiments, through various socio-cultural practices and institutions. This creation of the subject is crucial since, as Dan Goodly (2017) states, "Discourses are regulated systems of statements, ideas and practices representing particular forms of knowledge that we use to shape the subjective sense of who we and others are" (p. 126).

The various complex genealogies of discourse and the institutions that foster their circulation and practice end up in the production of knowledge of disability as a category. This categorisation is highly problematic when it is viewed as a norm and reality since reality is framed through various discourses and not by the other way. As Sara Mills (2003) puts it, "Discourse does not simply translate reality into language; rather discourse should be seen as a system which structures the way that we perceive reality" (p. 55). This crafting of reality can only be attained by juxtaposing the abled with the disabled. By defining disability and the disabled, the abled ones are actually procuring a safe position where they can exclude themselves

from the burden of defining or explaining themselves or their 'normal' status and the notion of "Normality secures its position by fixing abnormality as its undesirable antithesis" (Goodley, 2017, p. 128). This calls into question the plethora of ways the disabled have been represented throughout history and are represented whether it is in reality or in art.

Bertha and Disability

The portrayal of Bertha Antoinetta Mason in the novel *Jane Eyre* as an embodiment of madness and insanity discloses the myriads of ways her mental illness has been projected and celebrated as a disability category which needs to be avoided and subjected to the process of 'othering.' Bertha's corporealisation of 'madness' can be identified as an outcome of the normate norms of the normal/abnormal binary that existed during the Victorian era. In his *Madness and Civilization*, originally published in 1961, Foucault introduces the homonymous concept as a discursive production of twentieth-century medical and cultural discourses (Foucault, 1988). The concept of madness is nothing but a phenomenon skilfully crafted through social and political institutions like hospitals and mental asylums, which ensure the control and confinement of the dissent and mad. Similarly, Bertha's madness corresponds to Foucault's concept of the same as an outcome of the discursive practices that differentiate the sane/abled from the insane/disabled.

In nineteenth-century Victorian England, the idea of madness or madness as a disability category was considered as a pathological condition which was unique to the women lot. Rather than focusing on the social and cultural conditioning and creation of madness as a disability category, society viewed mental and such clinical conditions as the reality which needs to be treated and, for instance, isolated. The impairment/disability binary during the age favoured the propagation of the latter since society was inherently favouring abled-bodiedness over the other. To be a woman in a patriarchal society like Victorian England and to be mentally ill at the same time could subject her to double oppression, being the 'disabled woman.' This interpellation of 'madness' and 'insanity' on female bodies can only be studied by

drawing a distinction between the physical inability and the cultural disability since, as Elizabeth J. Donaldson (2002) writes in her essay "The Corpus of the Madwoman: Toward a Feminist Disability Studies Theory of Embodiment and Mental Illness:"

> A theory of the corporealization of mental illness demands a closer examination of the relationship between *impairments* and *disability*. The distinction between impairment and disability, the material body and the socially-constructed body, has been a crucial one within disability studies. (p. 111)

Analysing the social and cultural conditions in the creation of the distinction between the sane and the insane and the long history of madness, Foucault (1991) posits that "rather than asking *what*, in a given period, is regarded as sanity or insanity, as mental illness or normal behaviour, [he asks] *how* these divisions are operated" (p. 74). Bertha's congenital impairment and her disability status hence need to be analysed since the "how" corresponds to a cultural category which is critically related to gender status as a woman. For Donaldson (2002), "reexamining the impairment-disability system, and moreover repositioning mental illness as a physical impairment, seems appropriate and particularly necessary when we speak of severe and chronic mental illnesses within the disability studies rubric" since Bertha's illness is long forgotten and the disability status of 'madness' is conferred upon her (p. 112).

Musings on Bertha's Portrayal in *Jane Eyre*

In the novel *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte adroitly crafts the characters in her narrative world where they struggle for political or cultural dominance in one way or another. With meticulous observation, one can find out how she tactfully juxtaposes the images of the normal and the abnormal or the normate and the non-normate. Her characterisation is intertwined with the various images of the disabled and the abled in a narrative world with its ableist hegemonic structures and corporealisation of normality. The character of Bertha Mason, who is madness incarnate, can be seen as an epitome of the socially constructed 'disabled' woman who is hysterical and insane.

The signification of Bertha's madness as a disability category is done through various discursive formations and articulations which bedrock the knowledge of impairment as disability and eventually permit power to those who create this knowledge. To this to actually work, to validate Bertha's disability status, one needs to differentiate him/her as abled or normal. To mark one insane, one needs to procure what is deemed as sane, and this can be achieved by allowing, as Donaldson (2002) finds it "juxtapositions between normative and non-normative bodies, between the accidental and the congenital, between masculine rationality and feminine embodiment, and between melancholy and raving madness" (p. 102). These binary oppositions are pivotal since they help to promote and validate the 'statements' by the most powerful category and culminate in the subjugation of the opposite, validating the dominance of the normal over the abnormal. The discursive regularities of disability promulgated in this manner project mental illness as madness by authenticating sanity and rejecting the real medical condition by marking it as something which needs to be afraid of, shut, and kept in the attic since the "disabled body becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity" (Thomson, 1997, p. 6). These "troubling concerns" generate discursive practices which, in the case of Bertha Mason, alienate the mentally unstable (Thomson, 1997, p. 6). To make this demarcation possible, one needs to conceptualise the human body as sites of representation where lots of significations occur. It, at times, gets dehumanised and demonised to effect the 'insane, 'abnormal' corporeality as it is imperative to "conceptualize discourse as the construction of meaning, experience as the impetus for discourse, and the body as the medium through which discourse flows through experience to meaning" (Gabel, 1999, p. 39).

Throughout the course of the novel, the fact that Bertha is mentally impaired is deliberately kept under silence and is often viewed as dangerous, delirious, and needs to be leashed. The language Bronte uses to portray the character of Bertha overrides her subject as a normate and imposes upon her the status of the subjected other or the abnormal. Mr. Rochester, Jane and the rest of the characters identify themselves as normates, producing knowledge about Bertha as a

madwoman. This corporeal hegemony which they possess and exert puts them in the advantageous position to write and re-write narratives about Bertha's congenital disease. The character of Mr Rochester can be identified as the façade which creates knowledge and discourses on Bertha's disability. The fact that he is a normate and a patriarch makes him the sole authority to talk about Bertha's illness when compared to the rest of the characters. For him, her "Creole" inheritance, which he views from an ableist perspective, tends to be the primary reason for her madness (Bronte, 2019, p. 235). He finds her neurodivergent disposition as a direct result and influence of her corrupted abnormal family lineage. Instead of understanding the possible reasons behind her mental instability, he identifies her malady as incurable and inherent, 'othering' her further into the disability category, which is clear from the way he narrates about notion of 'madness':

> Bertha mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!—as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both point. (Bronte, 2019, p. 325)

This very attitude of Mr. Rochester also points towards the Victorian understanding of mental illness as a feminine essence, only attributed to women as "a sociomedical condition" (Donaldson, 2001. p. 16). This eventually culminates in their status as "a victim of diseased maternal heredity" (Showalter, 1985, p. 67). Further in the novel, Mr. Rochester introduces his wife to Jane and others as someone who is beyond control and reason. In Chapter 26, he reminds Mr. Mason, Bertha's brother, about the awful incident when she bit and stabbed him to conform her to the status of the insane (Bronte, 2019). When Mr. Rochester reveals 'the truth' about Bertha to Jane, he even reprimands himself for being so naïve to bring Jane to Thornfield Hall, to imminent danger, since he knew "how it was haunted" by the presence of his wife (Bronte, 2019, p. 334).

The normate and ablest attitudes are further fostered when he characterises Bertha as an unpredictable wild animal. He tells Jane that he will reward Grace Pool, the honest servant at Thornfield Hall, two hundred a year to look after his wife; however, he also suggests the company of her son since "in the paroxysms,…[his wife] is prompted by her familiar to burn people in their beds at night, to stab them, to bite their flesh from their bones, and so on— (Bronte, 2019, p. 335). This corresponds to the notion of the mentally ill as the mad under the disability discourse. Bertha's character is rendered fundamentally evil and dangerous. By portraying her as mad and having an unsatiable passion towards chaos, her identity is discursively produced, marking the deviant as unnatural. Mr. Rochester's account of Bertha as someone who is incapable of emotions or comfort brings to light the ways the disabled are perceived as incapable of the same temperaments. He identifies himself as someone who has tried enough to understand her and her madness but failed. The perception of the disabled or mad as someone who is beyond salvation and comprehension is clear when he points out Bertha's gradual transition into a 'madwoman' as he finds "her character ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices sprang up fast and rank: they were so strong, only cruelty could check them" (Bronte, 2019, p. 340). The notion of "frightful rapidity" underlines the fear society has towards the non-normates (Bronte, 2019, p. 340). All Mr. Rochester wants is redemption from his "bad, mad and embruted partner!" (Bronte, 2019, p. 326). These various depictions of her 'madness' are of paramount importance since it is discursively projected through the mental attitudes of other characters and societal norms on being normal for "Discourses of one and the other work to frame human identities" (Goodley, 2017, p. 127).

Apart from Mr. Rochester, through the attitudes and sentiments of other characters, Bronte draws the character of Bertha as an embodiment of animalistic monstrosity which intimidates everyone who tries to understand her. The mentally disoriented is seen as lacking humane attributes and rationality. This is evident when Jane describes Bertha, from an ablest, normate plane, when she sees her for real for the first time:

> In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, his its head and face. (Bronte, 2019, p. 326)

Jane's benevolent paternalistic attitude is pellucid when she finds Bertha as a poor creature who "cannot help being mad" (Bronte, 2019, p. 335). This again reflects the doggedness with which the normates construct the disability paradigm, effecting the subjugation of the so-called disabled. By the end of the novel, when Jane finds out that Mr. Rochester was hurt and a terrible tragedy has befallen Thornfield Hall, she is seen finding solace in finding out that he has not become mad that she "had dreaded he was mad" (Bronte, 2019, p. 475). This shows the extrapolation of madness as a disability which is worse than any other form of ailment. The characters in the novel tend to overlook Bertha's pathological condition as a curable disease, for they view the concept of madness, as Elaine Showalter (1985) writes in *The Female Malady*, "as the mask of the impotent and unfit, the sigh of social, intellectual, and moral decline" (p. 104). These all amount to the production of madness as a discursive category under disability, confiscating with ease the authority of the non-normate as though they are provenance of eternal abnormality. The knowledge that 'the mad' is perilous is subpoenaed through the antithetical attitudes of the normal, who find themselves as the locus of sanity.

The disability discourse and its nuances are further attuned by relating Bertha's character with certain institutions and stances which corroborate her 'madness' and necessary confinement. For Mr. Rochester, Bertha is innately mad "since the medical men had pronounced her mad" (Bronte, 2019, p. 342). This medical perception and understanding of madness can be appertained to Foucault's notion of mental asylums where the supposedly mentally insane are discursively created and confined. Medical discourses establish the demarcation between the abled and disabled. As Donaldson (2002) finds it, for Foucault, mental asylum "is primarily a form of institutional control" (p. 100). This control of or exertion of power over Bertha is

disseminated in the novel through the image of Thornfield Hall, which symbolically and, for Bertha, literally represents the workings and power dynamics of an asylum. The knowledge that the mad must be confined ends in the discursive production of the subjected self. This abode of the insane is no longer a place of glitter or solace but of "the great confinement" (Foucault, 1988, p. 38).

The novel projects the image of Thornfield Hall as the mode of ideal confinement for Bertha and her madness. The regimes of sanity or normality extrapolate the apparatuses which result in the freedom of the sane and, at the same time, in the confinement of the insane. The idea of confinement ideologically sanctions mental illness as deviant and madness. In the novel, Mr. Rochester projects himself as the sole authority who sanctions Bertha's confinement and corresponding madness. The idea that Bertha is kept in a room with no windows and with a door safeguarded by "Mr. Rochester's master-key" conjures up the very primary notion of confinement in the novel (Bronte, 2019, p. 326). To let Bertha out of the room is to unleash the impending doom. This sane grammar discursively enunciates and sanctions the normate status of Mr. Rochester with other others and Bertha with her non-normate status. By confining Bertha and by demeaning the Hall, Mr. Rochester is actually disseminating the knowledge which approves the status of confinement and the confined. For him, Thornfield Hall is nothing but "a blackened ruin" (Bronte, 2019, p. 470). The disgust with which the normates/abled view and comprehend the non-normate/disabled and their imperative confinement is crystal clear when he says how "glad was [he] when [he] at last got her to Thornfield, and saw her safely lodged in that third-storey room, of whose secret inner cabinet she has now for ten years made a wild beast's den—a goblin's cell (Bronte, 2019, p. 343). He also finds the Hall an ideal place to "shelter her degradation with secrecy" (Bronte, 2019, p. 343). Foucault crystallises the concept of confinement in his *Madness and Civilization*. The discursive practices challenge the authority of the subject and underline the concept of madness as something to be confined as a norm. As Foucault (1988) discerns it:

> Ultimately, confinement did seek to suppress madness, to eliminate from the social order a figure which did not find its place within it; the essence of confinement was not the exorcism of a danger. Confinement merely manifested what madness, in its essence, was: a manifestation of non-being; and by providing this manifestation, confinement thereby suppressed it, since it restored it to its truth as nothingness. (pp. 115-16)

The idea of madness as a disability category is discursively articulated through various ways within the novel among which the language Bronte uses plays a seminal role since "Discourses…are constructed through linguistic rules and social practices which direct our attention to the politics of knowledge-producing activities" (Leonard, 1997, p. 12). The animalistic language the characters use to refer to Bertha overrides her subject as normal and imposes upon her the status of the abnormal. Throughout the course of the novel, Bertha's character is addressed in terms that are abhorrent and reprehensible. Bronte (2019) uses the terms such as "a beast," "strange wild animal," "clothed hyena," "the maniac," "the lunatic," "a demon," "mad-woman," fearful hag," "wretched sister," "it," and so on to represent Bertha which show the ableist and normate attitude the rest of the characters towards her (pp. 326-340).

As Valerie Beattie (1996) finds it in her essay entitled "The Mystery at Thornfield: Representations of Madness in "Jane Eyre:""

> The ways in which Bronte applies the word "madness" and its cognate terms "maniac," "lunatic," and "insanity," to several of the characters in *Jane Eyre* is a rejection of semantic certainity, and could be viewed in Kristeva's terms as an oscillation between semiotic and symbolic. (p. 498)

These terms help to create the subject of Bertha as wild and untameable and the knowledge that her madness is multifaceted. The narrative also denies Bertha her voice which can be related to the denial of her sanity. The fact that she does not utter a single word throughout the novel perpetuates her disability status and makes her devoid of substance and rationality. By denying her narrative voice, she is denied subjectivity and agency, and her 'madness' as a disability

is carried forward in a perfunctory way, emphasising the disempowerment of the mentally ill.

Conclusion

The power/knowledge machinery creates the modality of normality through various discourses which run through society, institutions and human relationships. The corporealisation of the disabled can be recognised as an outcome of the power/knowledge dynamics and discursive practices where the 'normal' creates narratives about the 'abnormal,' eventually 'othering' the latter from the mainstream social, political, and cultural milieus. Bertha Mason's notion of madness, under these critical lenses of Foucauldian analysis and disability studies, can be identified as an outcome of the various discursive practices which sanctioned normality as a norm and abnormality as a deviation, where the latter is often resorted to women. The social creation of disability calls into question the myriads of ways Bertha's 'madness' is created as a disability category since, as Goodley (2017) elucidates, "Disability is no longer considered as a neutral sigh of abnormality but is recast as a 'discourse of cultural diagnosis'" (p. 131). As the impaired are created 'disabled' socially and culturally, so is created the notion of Bertha's 'madness', which is merely a mental impairment. Like the normates who create knowledge about the non-normates and perpetuate power, Bertha's disability is also created by those characters and the contemporary paradigm who and which hold power and authority over her disabled, mad subject. As Sara Mills (2003) contends, "it is power/knowledge which produces facts," and these facts are put into motion through discourses (p. 70). These discourses are, in turn, "associated with relations of power" that 'manufacture' the conditions of the self, whether it is abled or disabled (Mills, 2003, p. 54). Bertha's madness as a disability is discursively produced, incorporating the power/knowledge dynamics through the attitudes and institutions that existed in nineteenth-century Victorian England. Bertha is excluded from the realm of normality since she does not conform to the norms, and so are the disabled human figures. Bertha's antithetical being to Mr. Rochester and the rest of the characters creates an imbalance which places them better off than her since they are physically and mentally 'powerful' asserting the

normal corporealisation, and it is evident that "where there are imbalances of power relations between groups of people or between institutions/states, there will be a production of knowledge" (Mills, 2003, p. 69).

In conclusion, by comprehending Bertha's notion of 'madness' as a mere mental illness and a social construction performed through intertwined power, knowledge, and discursive practices, the disabled subject can be cleaved away from the disability status since it is discursively produced and articulated. To put it simply, in Simone de Beauvoir's (1953) terms, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman [and a disabled]" (p. 273).

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